

<p style="text-align: center;">DCFS Advisory Committee and Stakeholders Meeting October 30, 2006</p>
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Committee Members Present: Gary Ewart, Paul Kelly, Rich Huddleston, Michelle Trulsrud, Consevella James, Howard Turney

Committee Members Absent: Benny Gooden, Bruce Cohen, Carla Reyes, Connie Tanner, Dana McClain, David Tindall, Dean Burbank, Debra Hurd, Jerry Jones, Jerry Walsh, John Smith, Johnny Key, Joyce Warren, June Lang, June Simpson, Karen Worley, Rose Bates, Rose Warfield-McGill, Sherri Jo McLemore, Sherry Mangrum, Stephanie Hammett, Trudi Ramsey, Yvette Murphy

DCFS/DHHS Staff Present: Pat Page, Alicen Bennett, Billye Burke, Bob Sebourn, Calvin Wilbon, Cecile Blucker, Debbie Roark, Debbie Shiell, Elaine Jackson, Gary Evans, George Weber, Kim Alexander, Marilyn Counts, Marty Nodurfth, Melissa Singleton, Miranda Raines, Mona Davis, Rosemary White, Sandi Doherty, Sheryl Alexander, Tonya Tackett

Others Present: Charlotte Tubbs

Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Page welcomed the DCFS Advisory Committee members and asked for introductions to be made. Michelle Trulsrud was welcomed as a new member representing CASA.

Mr. Huddleston congratulated Pat on her recent appointment as the Interim Director of the Division of Children and Family Services.

Ms. Page acknowledged the congratulations and said that she felt that the priority of the interim will be child protection. There are three major issues to be addressed by this Committee: Safety, Permanency and Well Being. Themes will be accountability, best practice and respect. Respect should be shown to every member of the staff, parents, clients and any others that we may encounter. We want to sustain momentum the agency has obtained.

Despite having high caseloads we successfully completed our Program Improvement Plan (PIP) and Accreditation Process (COA).

It was agreed upon that to delay review of the Arkansas Advocate Report until the next meeting.

The role of DCFS Advisory Committee was discussed and the letter of appointment that is sent to each person was read and discussed. Participation is a key part of this board and although it seems fairly obvious it has been a problem. Ms. Page asked the Committee to take a personal role in addressing the problem and opened the floor for discussion on this issue.

Mr. Huddleston began with a different topic and said he would like to move that the Committee set the agenda for DCFS Advisory Committee meetings and Ms. James agreed. Mr. Kelly, Mr. Turney and Mr. Ewart were not in agreement that the Committee agenda be set by members but rather that the members take a more active role in providing suggestions to DCFS.

Mr. Kelly said that he would like to see upcoming legislative information so that the Committee members could help DCFS in a more active role. Ms. James and Mr. Huddleston wanted to review this information also. Mr. Turney asked if there could be more information on worker recruitment in a format that would show how changes could be made based on a dissection of personal data. Ms. Page called on Mr. Weber who clarified that our current data base was unable to take existing information and provide this data. Ms. Page asked that the Committee bring ideas concerning a Foster Parent Advisory Committee so that recruitment of foster and adoptive parents could begin. It was suggested that there was a need for an early warning system within our system to alert DCFS that case overload or understaffing was reaching a critical point. There is still the issue of what to do any differently since worker turnover is a recurrent fact at this time.

Ms. Page said that in the final analysis what she wanted was for the Committee to take ownership of the issues set forth in the agenda and for the Committee to bring ideas to DCFS regarding these issues. The Committee has been invited, in every meeting notice, to submit issues for the agenda. The vital role of the Committee is to bring forth new ideas for consideration, provide input as stakeholders, and offer assistance as a Committee that assumes ownership of the solutions for these issues. Ms. Page opened the floor for comments.

Mr. Kelly asked about services and resources the family service workers may be struggling with from their perspective, at a working level, and suggested subcommittees. Mr. Kelly agreed with Ms. Page that an active role was needed and said that Advisory Committee members should volunteer to take the role of reading and summarizing the volumes of legislation or figures representing DCFS information they request.

Ms. Trulsrud said that outcomes from a confidential subcommittee might be more likely. Ms. Blucker said that she did not think that confidential subcommittees would be a good idea because it implies that we as an organization do not condone free speech and that we are operating in an atmosphere of fear. Mr. Turney said that he did not think confidential committees or any division of the Committee from DCFS as in being in control or in charge of the agenda or meetings was productive and seemed contrary to the role they had accepted.

Ms. Page asked about the possibility of a Working Advisory Committee. Also, a Youth Advisory Committee role for volunteers of the Advisory Committee (for older foster youth). Ms. Page said that the Assessment of Systems for Best Case practice visited all areas for and detailed the best and worst and this was handed out to advisory Committee's last meeting. This should be an annual process. Ms. Page said that if the Committee wanted to elect subcommittees they would need to provide their own secretary or minutes person to provide DCFS with details of these meetings.

Ms. Page addressed the problem of Committee member attendance and asked for volunteers to work on this problem using the current contact information that we could provide them. The list of appointed members and their contact information was handed out and Committee members signed up to contact and find out if they are still viable candidates for this position and to encourage them to participate and gather their input and bring this information to the next meeting. To research and find a method that will encourage participation and attendance. Ms. Huddleston said that she supported the Committee making the necessary calls and providing assistance.

Ms. James asked how other DHHS divisions impact DCFS regarding services, resources, etc.) Ms. Page said that training is ongoing in that area.

Mr. Turney put forth the question "What does DCFS need from the Committee"?

Ms. Burke said an advocate from outside DCFS, members of the Advisory Committee, would be powerful when it comes time to go to the legislature. Ms. White would like the Committee to participate in mentorship with the workers. Ms. Trulsrud said an open joint forum would provide the most benefit.

Ms. Page clarified that the term ownership of the Committee is to convey the need for the Committee to participate in resolution of issues DCFS needs help with and to provide insight and assistance to a system that is struggling to be better. DCFS cannot abdicate management, and must maintain autonomy, but the Committee's input is vital.

Mr. Turney said joint ownership with DCFS as the controlling factor is the necessary path to take. Ms. Blucker said when we look at problems and strengths it is important to see where things are going right and build on that. Mr. Kelly said that he believed that the public is connected with caring aspect regarding DCFS issues but do not know how to participate in a solution. Ms. James said she received an email from a Florida based organization on legislation and was amazed at the connectivity that can be made with just an email. She said that someone from the committee should investigate their outcomes. Ms. Page asked for a volunteer from the Advisory Committee for this.

Mr. Turney and Mr. Kelly again made it clear they are against any separation of the Committee members from DCFS as the management of the Committee.

Items of interest are, November 3rd for Executive Regs, November 8 for Budget Hearing.

Ms. Shiell discussed the Organizational Cultural Survey, focus group sessions and Leadership development training, distributing information to the Committee.

Ms. Alexander updated the Committee on the Policy regarding Foster Parent Drug Testing. A handout will be given as part of the initial application process should they pass the other points necessary to be accepted. The contractor used for the testing is the same one that tests our state employees.

Ms. Blucker discussed the Legislative Audit and IV-E Adoptions. The Budget and Biennial request is pending the Executive Recs. A redesign is being undertaken so that a per child cost can be analyzed and provider billing can be done. There has been a major cost increase in placement contracts, emergency shelters, and similar items. We will need to adjust contracts based on first of the year projections. There will be a reallocation of assets. Information was distributed to the Committee.

A handout of family service worker personnel with average years of service, filled positions and separations and related information was handed out. AASIS does not tell how long a worker has been in a position, only how long they have been a state employee. Ms. White said that “on-call” has a major effect on vacancies.

Mr. Kelly thanked DCFS staff for the worker information detail. And would like to be able to compare COR outcome when possible.

Ms. Page said that with the Mentoring Supervisor Grant, additional resources proved to provide improved outcomes. The Area 1 Assist Team is in the process of updating protocol.

There will be a grassroots adoption coalition to recruit adoptive parents with monthly meetings. November is adoption awareness month and there are similar scenarios of adoptive awareness events around the state.

Next Meeting

The next DCFS Advisory Committee Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 14th at 12:30 p.m. in room 5368 in our offices at 7th and Main, Little Rock, Arkansas.